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Empower teachers, power up technology.

Authors:

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Abstract:

Describes the benefits of getting teachers to use technology at school in the United States. Need for preparing faculty and staff before installing technology systems; Factors that promote faculty and staff use of technology; Problems associated with limited use of technology.

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**EMPOWER TEACHERS, POWER UP TECHNOLOGY**

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2. [Frustration](http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.fgcu.edu/ehost/detail?sid=d538ffa6-9071-4cd6-a1e3-ffb8acd5c3fc%40sessionmgr11&vid=1&hid=7&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN9709255578-3)
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Developing a community of technology users requires reengineering school-district management practices from transactional leadership to transformational leadership strategies which invigorate, motivate, and vault teachers to partner level, sharing responsibility in the educational process. Successful implementation of technology is not about equipment, but the empowerment of people.

In 1993, the Westfield Washington Schools, in Westfield, Indiana, implemented a sophisticated technological platform. But system sophistication matters little in terms of the challenges leaders face in motivating faculty and staff to use technology.

Prior to installing a new system, administrators must prepare faculty and staff for the new infrastructure. Administrators normally agree that faculty and staff should be involved in district programming initiatives. Faculty and staff support is often solidified when they are allowed to participate in planning with district administrators from the beginning of the project. This collaborative discovery pays long-term dividends for administrators and the organization.

As Westfield's program developed, leaders recognized the need to increase involvement and legitimize empowerment of faculty and staff. The first step was to create enthusiasm for technology and an understanding by a core group of teachers of what could be done with it. Second, a district consultant developed a pilot program to train a core group; 18 staff members received five days of training at Ball State University in areas of technology to be available in Westfield.

By the end of that week, most participants concluded technology could be fun, exciting, and frustrating. Returning to Westfield, the teachers shared products developed during the training and discussed with colleagues how technology as an instructional tool could stimulate the teaching and learning process.

Their enthusiasm provided a foundation for future program growth. The majority of the group became project advocates. Administrators believed these early collaborative efforts would become the impetus for the program and produce leaders of educational technology teams.

Educational Technology (ET) Teams represented a departure from past practices by providing faculty and staff the opportunity to become leaders. These are building-level teams composed of teachers, parents, students, the media specialist, building principal, director of technology, and other building-level support staff.

In Westfield, faculty and staff who participated in early training sessions at Ball State became ET team members. The teams can make hardware and software decisions, monitor the technology budget, identify staff development needs, and serve as a communication link to faculty and staff.

Selecting team members is important in developing a positive infrastructure. Team selection is critical because faculty and staff must have credibility with their peers, possess good communication skills, and volunteer extra time needed for ET team activities. Team members become the spokespersons for technology in their building.

To be effective, team members must understand consensual decision-making strategies, establish methods to resolve conflicts, define roles for team members, and understand the "how and why" of communicating technology issues to faculty and staff. Consequently, the abilities to interact, collect information, and respond to colleagues become critical components of the process.

[Major Benefit](http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.fgcu.edu/ehost/detail?sid=d538ffa6-9071-4cd6-a1e3-ffb8acd5c3fc%40sessionmgr11&vid=1&hid=7&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d" \l "toc" \o "Major Benefit )

A major benefit of the ET team is its role in building-level communication. Team members regularly communicate with faculty and staff about all areas of technology. This continuous two-way communication, whether through informal conversation in the hall or lunchroom or more formal interaction at a faculty meeting, is the link that develops a common understanding regarding the system.

Those involved in the installation of technology soon learn it is not perfect and the system will not always work as intended. Although communication never totally alleviates confusion or criticism, faculty and staff discussions can result in understanding system problems; ineffective communication breeds cynicism and internal strife that eventually lead to limited use of technology.

The problematic aspects and uncertainties of technology made it imperative that faculty and staff be apprised of system gremlins. In West-field, communication with colleagues helped as the system was debugged. During a six-week window of opportunity, Westfield programmers found that excitement and pride flourished. Faculty and staff seemed more supportive of change.

As weeks and months passed, many faculty and staff reverted to traditional teaching strategies and abandoned technology. Effective principals assumed a dual role of challenging those who moved away from using technology and providing support when faculty began to incorporate technology into instructional activities.

The principal is the key to the ET team's success. Building effective teams requires principals to encourage spirited debate and discussion among team members prior to the team's decision. The principal should lead through asking questions, nurturing, and removing barriers for team members. Simply asking the right questions often increases the quality of decision-making by the ET team. The understated role of the principal actually increased the principal's power due to the support gleaned from team members.

The director of technology is an adviser to ET teams. The director attends ET team meetings and offers technical support, answers questions, and through sharing information, maintains program articulation between buildings. Following each meeting, a designated ET team member should prepare and distribute minutes to all district faculty and staff. This helps to solidify the building-level communications link and contributes to system-wide articulation of the technology program.

Districts investing in technology are encouraged to budget funds for staff development. A study by the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) reported that school districts allocated 15 percent of technology funds for staff development. Teachers in the study indicated they needed training in hardware, software, and integrating technology into the curriculum.

[Frustration](http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.fgcu.edu/ehost/detail?sid=d538ffa6-9071-4cd6-a1e3-ffb8acd5c3fc%40sessionmgr11&vid=1&hid=7&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d" \l "toc" \o "Frustration )

OTA respondents also suggested that training created frustration because the areas covered did not always meet their needs. Teacher respondents also complained of piecemeal training that failed to provide sufficient assistance. Planning for staff development is critical in developing a successful technological infrastructure.

In Westfield, principals developed a needs assessment profile for each teacher through one-on-one conversations. Instead of blanketing staff with generic inservice programming, administrators targeted programs to meet teachers' individual needs. This individualized approach, which saved time and money, was greatly appreciated by faculty and staff.

Westfield's ET team members also played a significant role in staff development. After they were trained, they assisted in training faculty and staff in their building. Even if ET team members were unavailable to provide training, their modeling of technology and availability for questions provided safe, accessible support for teachers learning to use a particular piece of hardware or software.

This alleviated one staff development concern, in that support continued to be available following training. Westfield ET team members' use of technology created a subtle pressure on their peers to use technology in their instructional activities.

One misconception regarding technology is that installing technology will reduce faculty and staff needs. Although consultants and vendors espouse the ease of using technology, the reality is that when technology is installed, additional personnel must be hired. In most districts, a director of technology is needed to monitor the system; to assist in problem solving, repair, and purchasing new equipment; and to watch trends. Staffing needs are often proportional to the sophistication of the system.

[Assistance](http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.fgcu.edu/ehost/detail?sid=d538ffa6-9071-4cd6-a1e3-ffb8acd5c3fc%40sessionmgr11&vid=1&hid=7&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d" \l "toc" \o "Assistance )

In Westfield, a media systems supervisor coordinated training, developed the distance learning program, and directed distribution-center activities connecting more than 200 locations. The district also hired a repair person with engineering experience to assist in maintaining the network and to repair and troubleshoot the 1,400 computers. ET teams and building principals also requested educational assistants in each building. These new employees helped maintain equipment and, more important, provided teachers and support staff with ongoing technical assistance.

Overall, eight employees were assigned to technology. Additionally, the media specialist in each building played a pivotal role in the technology program. Realistically, most districts will not require this number of technology support staff. The message is that if district officials do not provide appropriate levels of support, teachers and administrators are unlikely to use technology.

The problems associated with limited use of technology are organizational in nature. The financial investment by school boards and community awareness relating to the benefits of technology increase the stakes of this latest reform initiative. Technology may be the legitimate catalyst for boards, administrators, and teachers to explore current management practices and to move from transactional to transformational leadership.

Empowered ET team practices can build credibility and trust between teachers and administrators and create an environment where extraordinary success can occur. ET teams do not operate in a vacuum. Corporation management practices must mirror empowerment procedures accorded to the teams. Empowerment must be global, not just in one or two buildings.

Those who enter the technology race must examine factors that promote faculty and staff use of technology. Leaders must plan for staff development and staffing needs. Those who want to increase opportunities for success need to explore progressive management practices that empower and motivate teachers to move to new levels.

One major theme is that the human infrastructure is more important than the technological infrastructure. Without a staff development framework, organizational changes, and staffing support, leaders might be wise to fund other areas of need.

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By Van E. Cooley, From Educational Horizons

Van E. Cooley, former superintendent of the Westfield Washington Schools, in Westfield, Indiana, is Associate Professor of Educational Leadership, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008. Condensed from Educational Horizons, 75 (Winter 1997), 73-77 Published by Pi Lambda Theta, Box 6626, Bloomington, Indiana 47407-6626.